

Handwritten: Sullivan file

'It Grew Like Topsy'

Viet Nam a Mistake, Fulbright Feels

By PETE MANN
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Sen. J. William Fulbright sat in the South Florida sun and talked about U.S. military entanglement a half-world away.

"I really think it was a mistake to ever get involved in Viet Nam," he said. "The French were there for years, and they failed . . ."

Of course, he mused, this nation first offered assistance for reasons that were "90 per cent humanitarian," but the complex situation demanded a steady increase in the U.S. effort.

"Well," the Arkansas Democrat said, "it grew like Topsy, our involvement, and now we are in one hell of a mess . . ."

Fulbright, who is chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, made it clear, however, that he does not advocate the withdrawal of U.S. troops and technical assistance from South Viet Nam.

"Because you made a mistake getting involved doesn't mean you can turn around and pull out," he said.

What is the answer then? Expanding the conflict?

"No," Fulbright said. "I'm opposed to escalation of the war there . . . What we must do is find a sound and reasonable solution . . ."

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SOUND and reasonable solutions were, in a sense, the theme of Fulbright's two-day visit in Miami Beach during the recent convention of the National Association of Secondary School Principals.

In fact, in his words and by his own example, he made an eloquent and convincing case for the rational man.

In his speech to the principals, he related domestic and world problems to each other and stated bluntly that the common key to their solution lies in education at home and abroad.

If the war on poverty is to be won, he said, if the population explosion is to be defused, if lasting world peace is to be achieved — it will require the concerted efforts of rational and informed men everywhere.

Later, during a 75-minute interview that began in his Fontainebleau Hotel room and ended in the formal gardens outside, Fulbright fielded a wide range of questions with ease, equanimity and — above all — rationality.

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"I KNOW," he said, "that a lot of people are quite competent without much formal education . . . But education remains our greatest hope. It builds understanding and understanding is essential to solving problems."

Behind his horn-rimmed half-glasses, Fulbright's eyes took on the look of a man reviewing the past, searching for an example. He found one:

"Some foolish mistakes have been made," he said, then cited the circumstances which led to World War I and, in turn, to World War II.

"These vain, simple fools like the Kaiser get ahold of a country — well, why did he get ahold of it?"

It was the result of extreme nationalism and parochialism among the German people, he said. They saw only their own problems and did not relate them to the world beyond, except in the most self-seeking way.

"People need to understand that they're not the only ones," Fulbright said. "Educated people — in the sense that I mean — make fewer of these mistakes, or are less likely to make them."

Today, he said, Americans and Russians are trying to avoid war because nuclear weapons have made it vividly clear that the fate of one great power cannot be separated from the fate of the other.

It boils down to whether peace for all is more important than killing the so-called enemy.

"Now, who in the hell wants to kill Russians?"

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ASIDE FROM his powerful position on the Foreign Relations Committee, Fulbright is best known for the International Scholarship program which bears his name.

His sponsorship of that government-financed program was far from accidental. Like President Lyndon B. Johnson, Fulbright is a one-time educator.

He taught college classes for years and served as president of the University of Arkansas from 1939 to 1941. Then he entered politics for the first time and was elected to Congress in 1942.

Three years later, he was elected to the Senate, and there he has remained, his new career completely supplanting the old but never ceasing his basic concern with education.

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AS AN EXAMPLE of what a little learning can do,

Fulbright cited the impending problem of the world population explosion.

Medical advances, he said, have created the problem. It has been compounded by foreign aid programs which bring these medical benefits to underdeveloped lands, where uneducated millions live longer and produce healthier children.

"We spend billions of dollars trying to help them," Fulbright said, "and because of the population explosion, it all goes down the drain."

Population control, he said, depends entirely upon the education of the people.

"That's one illustration of what education can do," he said.

"And what do you think is the ultimate solution, the amelioration of the race problem right here at home?"

"Education."

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FULBRIGHT is blunt in his praise of President Johnson's aid-to-education proposals.

He called it "political artistry" that the President included aid to parochial schools in the anti-poverty program, avoiding a head-on collision with the constitutional question of separation of church and state.

It isn't the church schools the President wants to help. It's the children who attend them.

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This maneuver seems to have dispelled organized opposition to the aid program, Fulbright said, because both the National Education Association and Catholic groups have given it their support.

"There's no doubt there will be certain members of Congress who will raise that issue," he said, "but the big hurdle, the opposition from organizations, appears to have been overcome."

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WILL JOHNSON be able to get whatever he wants from Congress?

"That's overstating it," Fulbright said, "for any President. I think he'll get a very substantial part of his program, but some areas will stir controversy."

"That is inevitable in our system."

He reflected for a moment, then added:

"I have a very high respect for the President's political genius, but he is not infallible."